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The meows of respect

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The meows of respect

We shuffle into the enlarged confession box,
complete with popcorn and sleeping bags--
All to establish a little stature.
Time for an excavation
of our unspeakable sins.

I gaze through the glass of my seated crimes
as one chooses a chilled drink.
In the front are the excusable lies
told about clean rooms or brushed teeth.
I move in to where the pre-chilled cups are filled with my gluttony,
the harmonious trio of Ben, Jerry and my self?
the seven-cherry-cheesecake-slices incident?
The burning admiration for the man with the tight
gold band around his left ring finger?
No, it is a special occasion so
I dig deeper, further to the back, to the
half-forgotten beverage lying muted and
freezer burnt.
I tear it from the cooler.

The dime summer day--
the neighbor boy merely four,
with his lunch of crusty mac and cheese pasted on his shirt and face.
The kittens,
black and fluffy white, pale pink pleading tongues.
Water.
Speckled tub of hose water.
Their swarming furred legs.
They begged for breath.
The unknowing pleasure the ignorant
excitement that arose in us as we locked

our elbows and held their weak heads under.
Their attempted escape, running through
waggish grass with their sopping fur.
I shrieked, "Catch them, catch them--"
no matter the miniature claws
puncturing my skin
as they clamor for oxygen,
Their heart wrenching cries led by our
squeals of delight.

Now, in my healed hands, so many years later,
lies the half-dead kitten, exhausted,
her eyes glossed over.
Small, guilty drops of water
fleeing from her undeveloped lungs
There she is traded over--
swapped for their respect

shown now, in every shocked narrowed eye.

Jessica Holman